

Technology enables military father to watch son's birth

BY MELODY BRUMBLE • MBRUMBLE@GANNETT.COM • AUGUST 28, 2008

Matt LeBlanc watched from nearly 8,000 miles away as his son was born Tuesday morning at Christus Schumpert Medical Center in Shreveport.

The nonprofit Freedom Calls organized a video conference so Matt could watch his wife, Tiffany, undergo a Cesarean section. Their son Robert Matthew entered the world at 8:30 a.m. Tuesday.

"We got to talk to each other the whole time," said Tiffany LeBlanc. "After it was all over, our other son, Cole, who's 3½, got to come in and talk to his daddy."



Cole LeBlanc, 3, talks via video phone to his dad, Matt, who is stationed in Southeast Asia, while his mom, Tiffany, and his new baby brother, Robert, look on Wednesday morning at Christus Schumpert Medical Center in Shreveport. (Val Horvath/The Times)

The LeBlancs also visited during a video conference Wednesday morning. Matt LeBlanc, who's deployed to Southeast Asia, is scheduled to return home in mid-December.

"The Lord willing, we'll all be together at Christmas," Tiffany LeBlanc said.

Matt, a flight instructor at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo., was deployed in June. The family decided Tiffany and Cole would return to Shreveport, where Tiffany's family lives. The LeBlancs lived here when Matt was stationed at Barksdale Air Force Base.

Matt LeBlanc's sister Aimee LeBlanc, of Houston, contacted Freedom Calls, which has a satellite network to help keep U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan in touch with their families through phone calls and video conferencing.

Matt's video conference took place over an Internet connection provided by a hotel near where he's stationed.

"We helped the hotel, over 11 hours of time zone difference, with software, setup and testing connection. We also helped the hospital. There were some technical hurdles," said Kathryn Hudacek, Freedom Calls development director. "We were more than happy to help because our mission is connecting families, not just for milestone events, but for everyday conversations."

Christus Schumpert and Freedom Call staffers worked together to set up a laptop computer and Web cam for the birth. They ran into a glitch Monday afternoon, but a long computer cable and help from two Christus Schumpert staffers in Houston allowed application analyst Ritesh Patel and labor and delivery manager Ashli Davis to set up the video equipment at the Shreveport hospital, said Sally Croom, a Christus Schumpert spokeswoman.

Matt wiped tears and kept saying "Wow," as Robert Matthew entered the world, Davis said.

"We were going to try to do it ourselves with a Web cam, but we just didn't know where to begin," Tiffany LeBlanc said. "It was a great experience."